

Animals - Birds

Duxbury Clipper, Wednesday, December 2, 1998



Duxbury Field Notes

By FAHY BYGATE

Stuffed to the gills with turkey and all its accompaniments, my many house guests and I went on several calorie-burning excursions this weekend. I started with the Farm in Marshfield on Friday, hoping that the sight of a Long-eared Owl would detract their attention from the leftover pecan pie at least until lunchtime. The Farm was looking very pretty. The fields were a deep gold and brown and the sky a sharp winter blue. Canada Geese were loafing about here and there. We picked out some Gadwalls on the pond and a couple of Mallards in the wet panne. As we passed the Piggery Loop, a little flock of Eastern Meadowlarks went up from the fields and swirled past us. Their yellow breasts flashed at us as they turned and flew out past Fox Hill.

Some of us were out for exercise, so we walked the long trail towards the tiny South River. This Sparrow Trail meanders through wetlands, and Mass. Audubon has kindly provided a long, comfortable boardwalk on which to walk. Out on this trail, the weeds grow tall, and White-throated Sparrows flit and flutter in and out of the underbrush. The little river was very still and

quiet with just a small ruffle from the wind here and there. Out over the distant fields, a Northern Harrier flew low over the grass, searching for lunch.

From the top of Fox Hill we scanned the horizon for hawks but found only a scattering of crows. I once saw a coyote from this spot, and I tried hard on Friday to find one again. I knew that my guests would be astonished to see this animal, but despite the evidence of their existence here, we saw no coyotes.

After Fox Hill, I crossed my fingers and took them to the spot where the Long-eared Owls have been seen. But, by this time, my fragile hold over the movements of this independent group had slipped, and I had to round them up like stray sheep. The birch woods were empty of owls again, but I was the only disappointed one. My little rag-tag group, like a horse tuned toward the barn, was headed home fast.

We were winding our way through the woods on the Loop Trail boardwalk when I spotted the immature Red-shouldered Hawk that has been hanging around lately. He was, as usual, sitting quietly on a branch not far from where we were ourselves making quite a racket. He watched us with a cynical yellow eye as we passed the binoculars around. My group was properly appreciative of him and his quiet ways, and after marveling at his fierce look and gentle manner, we tiptoed past him and out onto the path home.

Other walks this weekend included North Hill Conservation land where we put up dozens of Ring-necked Ducks off the pond (I was clearly not getting any better at leading a quiet group) and Duxbury Beach. At the beach I found very few land birds, but on the ocean there were many Red-throated Loons, a Common Loon, a couple of Oldsquaws, and several distant scoters. Quite close to shore, I found our little wintering band of Red-breasted Mergansers coasting along. Their numbers have grown to over 30 birds this year!

Good Birding!